

Hot Tips

Good info for the new ham, and old stuff to refresh your memory



Alternate phonetics

Late one night during a Field Day, an unlicensed young lady called CQ at the club GOTA (Get-On-The-Air) station while I sat next to her, logging her contacts. Another club station located in Boise, Idaho, was trying and re-trying to decipher the little girl's announcement of ***gossara-leema***, which was her way of pronouncing ***golf-sierra-leema***, but they just couldn't make out the call sign. After five or six frustrating tries, she was in near-tears and ready to call it quits, so I whispered "great salt lake" to her, and into the microphone she shouted, "great-salt-lake!" Immediately, the Boise station acknowledged the GOTA station's call sign, made the proper exchange, and logged the entry. The little lady was all grins after that, making contact after contact, using ***great-salt-lake*** when other stations found her difficult to understand.

The ITU (International Telecommunication Union) has devised the English-language version of the ***ITU Phonetic Alphabet*** to help clarify communication between radio stations. Depending on your communication mode or how noisy your environment is, some of the words in the Phonetic Alphabet can be less than helpful. Also, it's sometimes difficult to hear some of the ITU words from a person with a mild speech impediment or whose native language is not English. For these reasons and more, it's often helpful to use phonetic words that are not part of the ITU list in the interest of ***clarity***. Here's a list of commonly used *alternate* or *substitute* phonetic words:

america	japan	radio
california	kilowatt	sugar
denmark	mexico	tokyo
florida	norway	united
germany	ocean	victoria
italy	queen	zanzibar

Can you use phonetic words not on this list, or even make up your own? Of course, such as ***michigan*** instead of ***mexico***, *if it helps with clarity*. These are only common substitutes. Just keep in mind that most hams are used to hearing the ITU phonetic words, so you might need to slow down when using alternates. Also, there are times when it's appropriate to speak multiple-word phonetics, for even further clarification. One often-used multi-word phrase is ***king-henry*** for K-H, the first two letters in the call signs of many Hawaiian hams. The one used in our above example, ***great-salt-lake*** is another.

Finally, please be fore-warned that there are some older hams who might berate those who use alternate phonetics, out of some religious or fanatic allegiance to the ITU list. Please rest assured that using alternate phonetics is not illegal, and is in fact highly encouraged, to promote communication clarity.

And the little girl at the GOTA station? Two months after that Field Day, she became KI7RES, the youngest ham in Utah at the time.



Kiara Johnson, before she became KI7RES

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